

## Using Corpus Analysis to Teach Cover Letter Writing through Data Driven Learning in EFL/ESL Classrooms

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### Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of a corpus of 75 sample cover letters followed by two sets of TESOL materials informed by this analysis, with the goal of giving learners the tools to effectively write cover letters. The samples were collected from the website Monster.com, and analyzed with the concordancer software AntConc. The materials follow the Data Driven Learning approach and engage learners directly with corpus data. Effective cover letter writing is a valuable skill for adult learners to possess in many learning contexts, and this paper hopes to provide educators with authentic tools to teach it.

### Introduction

Cover letters are essential components in the pursuit of a career. They can make the first difference between getting contacted for a job position or not. As such, it is essential that the composition of a cover letter reflect the proper stylistic features, *topoi*, and content requisites to stand out and be successful. For learners of a second language who are interested in pursuing a career that involves the use of that second language, the aforementioned points intersect with another array of linguistic challenges they have to overcome. In international settings, the rise of English as a Lingua Franca, and thus, its threshold role in many transactional and business-related contexts in deciding who gets the job, requires that non-native speakers of English be well-versed in the composition of professional texts, including cover letters.

Previous research (McDowell, 1987; Bathia, 1993; Henry and Roseberry, 2011) has shown the main characteristics of successful cover letters: they are intended to occupy the reader for a limited time; they should be formally and grammatically flawless; they must contain specific features, i.e. career goals, personal information, and a specific request for the wanted job. These features should thus be taught to ELT learners, in addition to the proper language to express them.

In the present paper, we utilize Corpus Linguistics to analyze a corpus of several cover letter samples to provide learners with authentic linguistic samples and help them produce



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appropriate cover letters. First, previous research on cover letters as a genre is summarized. Subsequently, we present results of our corpus analysis based on data. Finally, we demonstrate in two teaching units how corpus analysis can be used to inform Data Driven Learning (DDL), and, in this specific instance, its use in guiding learners' understanding of the language of cover letters.

## **Literature Review**

### **Genre and Genre Analysis**

What is a genre? According to Swales (1990), it is a combination of texts that share the same “structure, style, content, and intended audience” used by a discourse community (p. 8). For Miller (1984), a genre signifies a recurrent social action that tends to happen repeatedly in rhetorical social situations, often rooted “in actions of community” (p. 165). Henry and Roseberry (2001) defines the term genre as “a sociolinguistic activity in which the participants are able to achieve particular goals” (p. 2). In addition, Swales (1990) emphasizes communicative purpose as the most defining criterion to differentiate one genre from another. To sum up, a genre can be understood as a collection of discourse that has the same structure and linguistic features, as well as shares the same communicative goals in repeated rhetorical social situations.

Swales (1990) introduced the concept of moves in a genre, which are best described as segments of written or spoken texts with specific linguistic features that have a uniform orientation that provides content to the discourse (Swales, 1990). Ding (2007) defines a move as a “functional unit in a text used for some identifiable purpose” and “it is often used to identify the textual regularities in certain genres of writing” (p. 369). In other words, each move in a genre has a communicative purpose of its own, and together as a whole contribute to the overall goals of the genre. Many researchers analyze a genre by investigating these moves, and as a result reveal the patterns of organization as well as the linguistic features used in the genre to express those patterns (Dudley-Evans, 1997).

The purpose of genre analysis is to identify “the moves and strategies of a genre, the allowable order of the moves, and the key linguistic features”, as well as “to explain why these features were chosen by expert users of the genre to achieve their communicative purposes” (Henry & Roseberry, 2001, p. 3). Genre analysis is crucial to second language teaching because it provides a framework of linguistic structures that learners can follow for specific purposes. Identifying the moves and strategies of a genre can help learners produce authentic texts that better meet readers' generic expectations (Henry & Roseberry, 2001). Research has shown that genre analysis can help second language learners “develop new generic schema and develop new rhetorical patterns that assist them in successfully producing texts” (Crossley, 2007, p. 21).

### **Cover Letter as a Genre**

Along with the introduction of moves, Swales (1990) developed the Create a Research Space (CARS) model from his extensive study of textual properties of research articles, which was a step-by-step framework for research writing based on moves. Gradually, many contrastive rhetoric studies have expanded based on Swales' CARS model, covering analysis on various types of writings including business reports, letters of application, grant proposals, and editorials (Hou & Li, 2011). Bhatia (1993) was the first researcher to identify the writing of cover letters as a specific genre under business writing. He analyzed 200 job application letters and sales

promotion letters written by applicants from South Asia and America, and developed a seven-move structural model of cover letter writing (see Table 1) based on Swales' CARS model.

Table 1

*Bhatia's seven-move structural model of a cover letter* (Bhatia, 1993, p. 59).

Move/Step Structures	Description
Move 1	Establishing credentials
Move 2	Introducing the candidature
Step 1	Offering the candidature
Step 2	Essential detailing of candidature
Step 3	Indicating value of the candidature
Move 3	Offering incentives
Move 4	Enclosing documents
Move 5	Soliciting response
Move 6	Using pressure tactics
Move 7	Ending Politely

Bhatia's (1993) development of the seven-move structural model for interpreting cover letters, as shown in Table 1, has been used as a useful point of reference in several cross-cultural contrastive rhetorical analysis. Connor et. al (1995) studied the cover letter writing style of Flemish students and found similarities to the Indian group in Bhatia's research. Both groups showed a lack of using cover letters as means of self-promotion, which is in opposition to the American group studied by Bhatia (1993). Along similar lines, Hou & Li (2011) investigated the linguistic features of cover letters written by Taiwanese and Canadian students and found that there are significant differences in length, lexical density, descriptions of desire for the job, arguments in benefits for the company, and politeness expression between the two groups. Cover letters written by non-native speakers often lack certain key features. For instance, Al-Ali (2006) studied Arabic-English bilingual writers and found that they tend to overlook politeness strategies when writing cover letters due to a lack of awareness in sociocultural constraints, which can be detrimental for learners, since studies such as Upton & Connor (2001), who analyzed a corpus of cover letters written by American and European undergraduate students over a 10 year period, found that the style of cover letter writing has become increasingly homogenized between the two groups.

Even though Bhatia (1993) developed a vital framework for cover letter writing, his research largely focused on the similarities in structure between cover letters and sales promotion letters. Bhatia did not base his corpus on exemplary cover letter writing by native speakers in order to identify linguistic features for pedagogical purposes. The aforementioned findings based on Bhatia's research mainly focused on the contrastive analysis between cover letter writing styles between students of different cultural groups. This led Henry and Roseberry (2001) to recognize the importance of having a detailed analysis of cover letters written by native speakers, and therefore take the initiative to develop a specialized corpus of texts from 40 cover letters from different professional fields. Their research aimed to help language learners compete with native speakers for jobs with western multinational corporations. Their analysis found 11 moves of cover letter writing from native speakers, demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2

*Henry and Roseberry's Cover Letter Model (Henry & Roseberry, 2001).*

Move/Step Structures	Description
1. Opening	The writer identifies the target and invites the target to read the letter
2. Referring to a Job Advertisement	The writer refers to the advertisement in which the position was named and described
3. Offering Candidature	The writer states an interest in applying for the position
4. Stating Reasons for Applying	The writer gives reasons for wanting the position
5. Stating Availability	The writer indicates when he or she would be able to take up the position
7. Promoting the Candidate	The writer presents selected information demonstrating qualifications and abilities relevant to the desired position
8. Stipulating Terms and Conditions of Employment	The writer indicates expectations regarding salary, working hours, and other relevant contractual matters
9. Naming Referees	The writer names referees who will support the candidature
10. Enclosing Documents	The writer lists documents enclosed with the letter
11. Polite Ending	The writer ends the letter in a conventional manner
12. Signing Off	The writer signs his or her name in a respectful manner, thus claiming ownership of the letter

Among the 11 identified moves stated in the model, Henry and Roseberry (2011) found 2 moves that can be accomplished by a series of strategies. The 2 moves and their strategies found by Henry and Roseberry (2011) are demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3

*List of moves which can be accomplished by different strategies (Henry & Roseberry, 2001).*

Move	Strategies
6. Promoting the Candidate	Listing relevant skills, abilities Stating how skills, abilities were obtained Listing qualifications Naming present job Predicting success Listing publications Giving reasons for leaving present job Demonstrating knowledge of target position
10. Polite Ending	Welcoming response Inviting favourable consideration Thanking Offering to provide further information

Due to their higher level of frequency, Henry and Roseberry (2011) focused on investigating 5 strategies in Table 1: listing relevant skills and abilities; stating how skills, abilities were obtained; listing qualifications; naming present job; and predicting success. The summary of their findings on these specific strategies are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Summary of results of Henry and Roseberry's strategy analysis (Henry & Roseberry, 2001).*

Strategy	Common linguistic features	Important words
Listing relevant skills, abilities	Exposition, present simple tense, binary phrases with 'and', modals	<i>Experience, have, am, and</i>
Stating how skills, abilities were obtained	Past tense narrative, adverbials of time	Activity verbs
Listing qualifications	Expository, simple past tense, adverbials of time	<i>Have, hold, am, graduate, complete</i>
Naming present job	Expository, single lexical phrase frame, present tenses	<i>Work, employ, hold</i>
Predicting success	Claim-justification pattern	<i>And, know, feel</i>

In summary, corpus research on cover letter writing for pedagogical purposes is still limited. Even though Bhatia (1993) developed the seven-move structural model on cover letter writing, the purpose of his research was to compare the structure of cover letters and sales promotion letters written by both native and non-native speakers. Other research based on Bhatia's model was built on the analysis of non-native speaker corpora for contrastive analysis. Henry and Roseberry's study was the most recent one that focused on analyzing a corpus of native speaker cover letters with the purpose of finding distinct linguistic features that can be taught to second language learners of English. Their research was based on authentic letters of application collected from 4 different professions. This study, however, aims to push it further with a corpus of exemplary cover letters from 23 different professions. These cover letters are not previously written authentic letters. They are sample cover letters, designed by native speakers, to help people achieve their desired position. We believe that this corpus will be of great help in developing a pedagogical framework specifically for English language teachers, informed by the Data Driven Learning (DDL) approach.

### **Data Driven Learning**

The DDL approach aims at fostering the guided interaction between learners and sets of corpora data provided by the teacher (Friginal, 2018). In a DDL class, language exploration through data is encouraged with a learning process of illustration-induction-interaction (I-I-I; McCarthy and Carter, 1995, in Timmis, 2015, p. 110), in a "research-then-theory" fashion (Hadley, 2002). First, learners are introduced to a specific language form(s) with authentic samples (illustration); secondly, they work on said data to try and discover target patterns and rules (induction); finally, they engage in communicative production of the target structures based on their discoveries (interaction).

Thus, learners occupy a central position in DDL by being researchers, discoverers, and constructors of knowledge, which in turn increases their autonomy and independence. They can either work directly with concordance softwares or with sets of authentic material procured by the teacher. This ensures that they are always targeting and getting used to the 'fuzziness' of language use, which is neither straightforward nor fixed (Leech, 1994).

### **Research Questions**

In this paper, we aim to address the following questions:

- 1 Overall, what are the top frequent words in cover letters? What are the top content and function words? Why do they occur frequently in this corpus? What do they reveal about the content/features of the target genre?
- 2 Focusing on a few function and content words that stand out, how are they used? What are some notable linguistic features of these words? What is their distribution?
- 3 What are the top n-grams (interval 1-6)? Why do they occur frequently in this corpus? What do they reveal about the content of the target genre?

## Methodology

### Corpus Creation and Description

In order to carry out the corpus analysis, a mini corpus of 75 sample cover letters in 23 professions were downloaded from the website monster.com. The specifics of the mini corpus are the following:

- Text type: cover letters for job applications
- Corpus size: 75 cover letters, for a total of 19,018 tokens
- Sample source: <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/cover-letters>
- Corpus organization: samples were organized in job categories, namely: Administrative, Art/Design/Media, Business, Child Care, Education, Engineering, Finance/Accounting, Health Care, HR, Job Search, Law Enforcement, Marketing & PR, Military, Nursing, Real Estate, Restaurant, Retail, Sales, Science, Student, Technology, Trades, Transportation.
- Limitation: The source does not specify if the samples are authentic or not, which raises the question of how closely they reflect actual cover letters in use in society. On the other hand, getting hold of real cover letters (a rather private type of text) can be very challenging, and, for the purpose of helping learners mastering the type of language used in this type of discourse, the samples comprising the corpus were deemed relevant and thus usable.

### Analytical Procedure

In order to analyze the texts from this mini corpus, we used the software called [AntConc](#), a concordance program developed by Laurence Anthony (2011). Texts can be input into this program, and it can generate many linguistic features, including key words in context, concordance lines, or concordance distribution plots. AntConc can also generate word clusters or lexical bundles, n-grams, collocates, word frequencies, and keywords.

## Corpus Analysis

### Research Question 1: Most Frequent Words

#### *Top Frequent Words*

Figure 1 shows the top frequent words in the Mini corpus. As shown in Figure 1, *and* and *I* are the top 2 frequent words, with the frequency of 942 counts and 595 counts respectively. In cover letter writing, *and* is mostly used for listing skills and qualifications (such as ‘excellent patient care and attention to detail,’ or ‘performance as a fuel transporter and gas hauler’), and *I* for presenting oneself (‘I have received repeated commendation,’ ‘I would be a good fit for you’). Cover letters are also from one person addressing another person, so it would make sense that the two most frequent pronouns are *I* and *you*, and the most frequent possessive adjectives are *my* and *your*. Articles *a*, *the*, and *an* also belong to the most frequent word list. This shows that the text requires a lot of object identification (‘my qualifications match the requirements listed in the job posting,’ ‘ABC, a global pharmaceutical company’), which is expected in cover letters since the

writer would have to demonstrate places and things that the reader does not have the knowledge of.

Figure 1  
*Top frequent words*

Rank	Freq	Word
1	942	and
2	595	i
3	562	to
4	453	a
5	384	of
6	371	the
7	359	in
8	323	for
9	311	my
10	222	as
11	189	with
12	169	your
13	164	at
14	147	you
15	123	an

In Henry and Roseberry's (2001) Cover Letter Model in Tables 1 and 2, the act of listing and object identifying seem to occur the most in promoting the candidate, including listing relevant skills and abilities, listing qualifications, listing publications, and demonstrating knowledge of target position. This shows the significance of the teaching of Move 6, Promoting the Candidate, in cover letter writing.

### ***Top Content Words and Function Words***

Table 5 demonstrates the findings of the top content and function words followed by their frequency number, drawn from the top frequent word list found above.

Table 5  
*Top content and function words*

Top Content Words	Top Function Words
<i>experience</i> (77)	<i>and</i> (942)
<i>sincerely</i> (73)	<i>I</i> (595)
<i>years</i> (70)	<i>to</i> (562)
<i>company</i> (64)	<i>a</i> (453)
<i>team</i> (59)	<i>of</i> (358)
<i>time</i> (59)	<i>the</i> (371)
<i>thank</i> (55)	<i>in</i> (359)
<i>position</i> (50)	<i>for</i> (323)
<i>call</i> (46)	<i>my</i> (311)

The list in Table 5 shows several features of the corpus:

- 1 transactional function: the nouns *experience*, *years* (usually collocating with *experience*), *company*, and *team* show the transactional type of interaction that cover letters have. In fact, the point of writing a cover letter is to offer one's expertise, service, or assets to a specific recipient – from an applicant to a job offerer. The fact that the writer mentions their years of expertise in a specific field follows this pattern, as well as the insurgence of the highly frequent content terms *company* and *team*: as general terms frequently found in all the different types of cover letters, they show the specific job-related nature of this corpus. Some examples extracted from the corpus are: 'I bring to the table 15 years of experience as a business analyst,' 'I share your company mission to find a cure,' 'I am motivated to join your team.'
- 2 default directionality: it is clear that the vector of communication starts from the writer. The verb *be* is in fact used in the first person, and *have*, in his few instances as a main verb, always has *I* as a subject (even as an auxiliary, which is the majority of the cases, *have* always has *I* as its subject). The adjectives *my* and *your* corroborate this, with *my* used more often. These two adjectives also reinforce the transactional function stated above. For example: 'I have consistently met quotas,' 'for you and your team to give you a taste of my culinary style.'
- 3 formulaic communication: as a way of formal writing, cover letters show their formulaic nature through the highly frequent adjective *dear* and the adverb *sincerely*, used as openers and closers.

A search for subsequent common words (top 20) in both content and function words showed the same traits: *thank (you)*, *position*, *skills*, *work*, *please*, *me*, *you*. A clear example extracted from the corpus is the following: 'These skills are highly relevant to the qualifications outlined in your flight attendant advertisement, and I am confident in my ability to integrate effectively into your crew.'

## Research Question 2: Usage of the Most Frequent Words

### Context and Behavior of Some Content Words

The word *experience* appears in Henry and Roseberry's (2001) list of important words under the strategy 'listing relevant skills and abilities' (Table 3), which is proven to be a strategy of high significance from the above analysis. From this mini corpus, *experience* appears to be the top content word with the highest frequency count of 77. This prompted us to further investigate the content word *experience*. Another notable frequent content word in Table 4 that we choose to examine further is *team*. The target terms were run on AntConc through the 'collocates,' 'frequent clusters,' and 'concordance lines' functions.

#### Content word 1: **Experience**

- Collocates (1L): *of, my, and, on, gained, with, this, management, customer, waitressing*
- Collocates (1R): *as, I, and, in, working, using, publishing, providing, performing, managing*
- Frequent clusters: *with five years of experience, am confident that my experience, I gained experience, I offer hands-on experience*
- Concordance lines are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Experience in concordance lines

Hit	KWIC
1	with great interest. As a pilot with experience in military, charter and co
2	cellence, create a memorable dining experience and exceed the expectati
3	, Outlook and Access). Broad-based experience covering a full spectrum o
4	tion. Additional qualifications include experience performing opening and
5	Mandarin, American Sign Language); experience as a classroom aide; cert
6	e to deliver an exceptional customer experience. I am confident that I wou
7	cations in ACLS and PALS. Extensive experience caring for newborns, infa
8	thorization and accountability (AAA). Experience delivering rapid, quality s
9	g my project and team management experience are credentials that includ
10	this clerkship would be an invaluable experience and opportunity to learn

The above collocates suggest grammatical patterns of the word *experience* in the corpus. It is usually used in the form of a noun since the most frequent collocations to the left are *of experience*, *my experience* or nouns such as *management experience* or *waitressing experience*. The collocations on the left suggest *experience* used as a noun because of the frequent noticeable use of gerunds after *experience* such as *experience working* or *experience using*, etc.

The word *experience* is used as a noun to refer to the time that the writer spent in a particular professional field. Some notable grammatical patterns are:

- noun + *experience*
- *with experience*
- *experience in*
- *experience* + gerunds
- *to gain experience*
- *to offer experience*

Content word 2: **Team**

- Collocates (1L): *your, talented, my, service, clinical, a, with, winning* (figure 3)
- Frequent clusters: *chance to join your team, interested in joining your team, a member of your team, work with your talented team*
- Concordance lines with some exemplary sentence use are reported in figure 4.

Figure 3

*Left collocates for team*

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	17	17	0	5.01902	your
2	3	3	0	8.33243	talented
3	3	3	0	1.63663	my
4	2	2	0	4.04703	service
5	2	2	0	5.87300	clinical
6	2	2	0	0.50907	a

Figure 4

*Team in concordance lines*

Hit	KWIC
1	for many years as a value-adding team member. Please call me at (555)
2	to speak with you about joining your team. You can call me at 555-555-5
3	ould make a valuable addition to your team, please feel free to call me at (5
4	make me a strong addition to your team, please call me at (555) 555-5
5	ant (AVA) designation and joined the team at DEF Pet Clinic in Somertown.
6	I would be an asset to your team. If you agree, please call me at
7	seeking to augment your leadership team with an experienced and accon
8	skills would benefit your customers, team members and bottom line if I ar
9	established book of business to your team, let's speak. You can reach me
10	ltivate repeat business and advance team success. I've contributed to the

The most frequent collocation with *team* to the left is *your*, and its frequency is significantly higher than other collocates, which is 17 compared to others at only 3 or 2. This shows the relevance of the term *your team* in the corpus. It signifies that the writer wants to be a part of the group that the reader represents. The word *team* carries a positive connotation, and the term *your team* creates a dearing sound, signifying that the writer is a team member, and is ready to work hard for the benefit of the team.

Some notable collocations for pedagogical purposes are:

- addition to your team
- asset to your team
- value-adding team member

### **Context and Behavior of Relevant Function Words**

Regarding function words, the top 2 function words *and* and *I* are chosen for investigation, together with *my* and *your* as they can provide useful evidence of the traits the two parts involved in the interactions should have.

#### Function word 1: **And**

- Collocates (1L): *time, skills, systems, experience, customers, work, standards, services, patients*
- Collocates (1R): *I, other, a, have, work, the, would, customer, support*
- Frequent clusters: *and I look forward to, and I am very interested, and I would like to, and would welcome the chance, and can be reached at*
- Concordance lines for usage of *and* in the mini corpus are provided in figure 5.

Figure 5

And in concordance lines

Hit	KWIC
1	ar Ms. Kohn: As a devoted customer and fan of ABC Bar & Restaurant, I w
2	for five years as a personal trainer and fitness instructor at XYZ Compa
3	prior success as a leasing consultant and licensed general contractor, I off
4	ation), I thrived within a high-volume and deadline-intensive environment.
5	ntories; and maintaining a clean, safe and positive work environment. Alth
6	ed performance as a fuel transporter and gas hauler for the #1 c-store ga
7	a client wrote on a review site and knew I had chosen the right care
8	. I strive to provide a warm, fun and nurturing environment in all baby
9	ant: I know what a huge opportunity and responsibility it is to win a chair
10	0 years of experience as a bar-back and bartender within luxury 4-star ho

The most frequent collocations on the left of *and* are all nouns, while the most frequent collocations on the right of *and* vary, including both function words and content words. This signifies that *and* is used as a conjunction for both words and sentences in the texts.

#### Function word 2: **I**

- Collocates (1R): *am, have, would, was, offer, look, can, earned, also, will*
- Frequent clusters: *I am very interested in, I have worked as a, I look forward to speaking, I look forward to hearing, I am writing to apply, I am confident in my, I am confident that I, I bring to the table, I have earned a reputation*
- Concordance lines are listed in figure 6.

The most frequent collocations to the right of *I* are strong words that show identity, will, and determination. They demonstrate what the writer has and can offer, as well as what the writer will and can do. They show a sense of confidence in self and the writer's competency. The most frequent clusters show a sense of interest and qualifications. Furthermore, it is important to

notice the frequent use of active voice with the pronoun *I* in the concordance lines presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6  
*I* in concordance lines

Hit	KWIC
1	I my career as a professional barista, I've earned a reputation as... A "Java
2	nt on Monster for a business analyst, I decided to apply immediately. Data-
3	saction averages in a 5-state region. I share ABC Corporation's commitme
4	s market presence on a global scale, I can help drive awareness of the am
5	ring elderly patients is a passion that I share, and I would like to speak
6	about a career as a flight attendant. I remember your kindness in explaini
7	any's posting for a project manager. I offer 11 years of experience execut
8	the first year as a teaching assistant, I intend to pursue a bachelor's degre
9	ortly after becoming a makeup artist, I read those words a client wrote on
10	four years on the ABC main campus, I served as a resident advisor (RA), c

### Function word 3: *My*

- Collocates to the right (up to 4): the content words collocate up to 4 to the right are *qualifications, skills, career, credentials, work, include, and ability*. These collocations confirm the 'self-promotional' goal of writing about themselves in cover letters. The semantic prosody is positive as well.
- Collocates to the left (up to 4): *confident, praise, throughout, during*. *Confident* and *praise* (positive sem. prosody) fall into the 'self-promotion' category, while the function words *throughout* and *during*, picked among other frequent function collocates, show another side of one's self-promotion: the recounting of past experiences that, in turn, prove the breadth of competences acquired in the past.
- Concordance: the immediate collocates to the right fall in the self-promoting category, either as qualities or past expertise: *my abilities, my experiences, my degree, my commitment, my credentials, my passion, my x years of....* Notable of the more formulaic nature of the corpus: *my resume, my cv* in sentences such as 'My resume is enclosed/attached...'. Frequently occurring clusters are '*confident in my ability*' (self-promotion with high semantic prosody), and '*commended for my.../commendations for ... (self-promotion)*.' *Concgrams* for *confident* are given in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7  
Confident *congrams*

Concordance Hits 7	
Hit	KWIC
1	the driver of company goals and confident in my ability to improve ABC Corporation's operatio
2	within the next six weeks. I am confident in my ability to serve your dentists and patients with
3	to providing quality care. I am confident in my ability to serve your practice and patients with
4	and international business, I am confident in my ability to create excitement for your brand. M
5	ion. Given the opportunity, I'm confident in my ability to achieve similar groundbreaking mar
6	ndant advertisement, and I am confident in my ability to integrate effectively into your crew.
7	thin the span of an hour. While confident in my skills across multiple HR practice areas, the c

Function word 4: **Your**

- Collocates to the right (up to 4): the content collocates to the right of 'your' show the characteristics of the letter addressee as a) a match for my expertise, i.e. the recipient of the writer's self-promoting: *team, program, support, members*; b) a target of a transactional communication: *opening, advertisement, needs*; c) a respected interlocutor to whom I'm making a special request (circling back to the formulaic nature of these letters): *sincerely, time* (as in 'thank you for your time'), *please*.
- Collocates to the left (up to 4): similar to the collocates to the right, the ones to the left show reverence expressed in formulaic ways (*thank, for* as in 'thank you for your time'), and the recipient as the writer's 'pick' in this transactional communication (*would* as in '[my skills/expertise] would be valuable/would benefit your customers/would add value'; *member* as in 'a [positive adjective] member of your team').
- Concordance lines of *your time* and *your team* are visible in figure 8 below.
- Frequently occurring clusters containing *you* express the frequent-occurring functions: a) formulaic: '*I look forward to your response*'; '*enclosed for your review*'; b) self-promoting: '*join your team*', '*match/meet your requirements*'; c) transactional communication: '*read/found your advertisement/ad*'.

Figure 8  
*Concordance lines containing your time and your team*

Hit	KWIC
134	to prepare sample dishes for you and your team to give you a "taste" of
135	and would welcome the chance to join your team. To schedule a meeting, p
136	significant contributions as a member of your team. You can reach me at 555
137	I like to speak with you about joining your team. You can call me at 555-E
138	Mr. Jones: I am interested in joining your tier 1 helpdesk team. A longtim
139	e@somedomain.com. Thank you for your time, and have a great day. Sin
140	set up a meeting. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hear
141	to schedule a meeting. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hear
142	to arrange a meeting. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to spee
143	you are busy, so thank you for your time, and I look forward to spee

### Research Question 3: Top N-grams by N-gram Size

The analysis of the n-grams involved clusters containing from 2 (2-grams) to 6 (6-grams) words.

#### 6-grams

The 6-grams show the formulaic nature of cover letters. The most frequent are listed in Table 6. Since the letters are taken from the same website and they are samples, there is not much variety in the types of formulaic expressions used as openings and closings. Further, all the proper nouns of companies are absent, or there are no actual phone numbers. Nevertheless, it is clear that cover letters have a highly structured order. The first 14 entries in the list are found in the closing stage, and they show what should be mentioned at the end of an effective cover letter: a) the request for a meeting, with verbs such as *set up, call, email*, as exemplified by the sentences ‘*Please call me at [phone number] to set up a meeting,*’ ‘*To arrange a meeting, please call me at [phone number].*’ b) a default, formal salutation, such as shown by ‘*looking forward to speaking with you.*’ The last entry, ‘*I am very interested in the,*’ is found at the beginning of the letters, and it provides suggestions on how to appropriately commence the written interaction, such as in ‘*I am very interested in the veterinary technician position posted on [platform name].*’ Looking at Henry and Roseberry’s (2001) Cover Letter Model in Table 1 and 2, the top 6-grams (as well as the 5-grams in the following section) reflect Move 2: Offering candidature, and 2 steps from Move 10: Thanking and offering candidature. The high frequency of these n-grams shows the particular patterns of wording in Move 2 and 10 in Cover Letter Writing, which students should learn and use if they want to sound natural in cover letters.

Table 6

#### Top frequent 6-grams

<i>thank you for your time sincerely</i>	<i>set up a meeting thank you</i>
<i>to set up a meeting thank</i>	<i>call me at [phone number] to set</i>
<i>[somedomain.com] thank you for your time</i>	<i>please call me at [phone number] or</i>
<i>at [somedomain.com] thank you for your</i>	<i>[phone number] to set up an interview</i>
<i>[somedomain.com] to set up a meeting</i>	<i>look forward to speaking with you</i>
<i>me at [phone number] to set up</i>	<i>please call me at [phone number] to</i>
<i>a meeting thank you for your</i>	<i>I am very interested in the</i>

#### 5-grams

Similarly to the 6-grams, the top frequent 5-grams shown in table 7 reveal three main functions: to express politeness and gratitude towards the reader by thanking them for their time (directionality and formulacity), to express that the writer is interested in the position (transactionality), or to show ways that the reader can contact the writer (transactionality and directionality).

Table 7  
*Top frequent 5-grams*

<i>thank you for your time</i>	<i>call me at [phone number] or</i>
<i>please call me at [phone number]</i>	<i>I am very interested in</i>
<i>to set up a meeting</i>	<i>a meeting thank you sincerely</i>

*Note.* The top 15 5-grams are variants of the six shown above, hence their exclusion.

Because of their similarity with the top 6-grams, the analysis was turned to those 5-grams that were not found in opening or closing positions. A selection of these is given in Table 8.

Table 8  
*5-grams in mid-letter distribution*

<i>i have worked as a</i> (freq. 7)	<i>confident in my ability to</i> (freq. 6)
<i>years of experience as a</i> (freq. 6)	<i>earned a reputation as a</i> (freq. 5)
<i>a bachelor's degree in</i> (freq. 4)	<i>I bring to the table</i> (freq. 4)

These are useful expressions to teach to students, as they give indications as to how they can highlight their strong points/experiences, which is, of course, one of the main points to cover in a cover letter (Move 6). It is interesting to note the overtly positive tone, accompanied by a high register, in sentences such as ‘*I am confident in my ability to create excitement for your brand,*’ and ‘*In this role, I have earned a reputation as a “trailblazer” in launching new or expanding existing programs.*’

#### **4-grams**

As it can be surmised by looking at Table 9, the frequent 4-grams showed the exact features of formulaicity and self-promotion to 6- and 5-grams (they were actually their reduced versions). Moving beyond the most frequent clusters, the two notable exceptions emerged, namely ‘*I take pride in,*’ and ‘*in this role I,*’ normally used to either list present job responsibilities/skills, or past experiences: ‘*Backed by P&C licensure, I take pride in helping my clients mitigate risk and guard against losses,*’ ‘*In this role, I interviewed potential clients and witnesses.*’

Table 9  
Top frequent 4-grams

<i>thank you for your</i>	<i>I am very interested</i>	<i>somedomain.com thank you</i>
<i>you for your time</i>	<i>to set up a</i>	<i>an interview thank you</i>
<i>call me at [phone number]</i>	<i>please call me at</i>	<i>set up a meeting</i>
<i>for your time sincerely</i>	<i>I look forward to</i>	<i>up a meeting thank</i>
<i>am very interested in</i>	<i>a meeting thank you</i>	

### 3-grams

Similarly to the 4-grams, the more frequent 3-grams (some of which are included in Table 10) are still contained in the longer n-grams and, as such, still fall into the ‘formulaic’ or ‘self-promotion’ categories. As far as less frequent 3-grams are concerned, many contain the phrase “ability to+verb” or “able to+verb,” followed by different verbs according to the field pertaining to the cover letter in sentences such as ‘*I have a proven ability to learn challenging concepts quickly,*’ ‘*I was commended for my ability to build rapport with witnesses,*’ ‘*I bring to the table 15 years of experience as a business analyst able to influence corporate growth strategies.*’ This structure is yet again a useful linguistic point to teach learners to ensure they successfully perform Move 6.

Cross-referencing the 3-grams with one of the most common content word in the corpus, *experience*, we also found an often-used construction: *experience in*, followed by more specific words according to the job offer: ‘*As a pilot with experience in military, charter and company settings, I offer 5,500 hours of flight time,*’ ‘*experience in both retail and hospital pharmacy operations (bullet point).*’ They are all connected to the *I* writing the letter, and are classifiable as being part of the ‘self-promotion’ function.

Table 10  
Top frequent 3-grams

<i>call me at</i>	<i>me at [phone number]</i>
<i>or email me</i>	<i>thank you for</i>
<i>thank you sincerely</i>	<i>for your time</i>
<i>please call me</i>	<i>you for your</i>
<i>look forward to</i>	<i>to set up</i>

### 2-grams

Many entries corroborate the point of the transactional nature of cover letters, and the specific direction of the message (from applicant to employer), combined with the ‘self-promotion’ and

'formulaic' functions. The top 15 not already contained in the longer n-grams above are listed in Table 9.

Table 9  
*Top frequent 2-grams*

<i>as a</i>	<i>I am</i>
<i>I have</i>	<i>me at</i>
<i>thank you</i>	<i>for your</i>
<i>in the</i>	<i>and I</i>
<i>dear ms.</i>	<i>at or</i>
<i>on monster</i>	<i>call me</i>
<i>you sincerely</i>	<i>of the</i>

The most common one, *as a*, almost always refers to a previous role occupied by the writer, and thus collocates with terms such as *experience, role, I have worked*. *In the* is also referring to the fields in which the writer has experience. Some examples extracted from the mini corpus are: '*I have worked as a children's librarian for [town] Public Library,*' '*in my current role as a barista for [name] Coffeehouse.*'

### Summary of Findings

The above analysis informs a great deal of real-life language use when writing cover letters. It shows the recurrent words as well as phrases that are present in cover letters. It also shows the position where they usually are placed in a cover letter. Common grammatical structures can also be inferred via the analysis.

To sum up, from the above analysis, we see that in a cover letter, the writer needs to express politeness and gratitude towards the reader by thanking them for their time, express that he or she is interested in the position, and show ways that the reader can contact him or her.

Furthermore, there are some notable grammatical structures that need to be taken into consideration: *of experience, with experience, and experience in, and experience + gerunds*. It is also important to use active voice with *I* along with strong words such as *will, can, have, offer, earn, etc.* to show a sense of confidence in self and the writer's competency. Using the term *your team* is important since it signifies that the writer is a *team member*, and is ready to work hard for the benefit of the team.

Frequent clusters of frequent words also should be taken into consideration when writing a cover letter. Some examples include: *with five years of experience, am confident that my experience, I offer hands-on experience, chance to join your team, interested in joining your team, a member of your team, work with your talented team, I am very interested in, I have worked as a, I look forward to speaking, I look forward to*

*hearing, I am writing to apply, I am confident in my, I am confident that I, I bring to the table, I have earned a reputation, etc.*

Furthermore, the analysis has shown several characteristics of the language used in cover letters:

- Self-promotion (from the writer side), in terms of skills, personal traits and past experience
- Recipient as a respect-worthy addressee
- Routinely reaffirmed transactional nature of the interaction
- Formulaic value of opening and closing sections
- Directionality and hierarchy: I (good candidate) look something from you (perfect match)

These findings were thus the foundation for two DDL-based classes, whose components are discussed in the following sections.

### **Teaching Materials**

Two sets of teaching materials were created as suggestions for teachers based on the analysis above, aiming at different target students. Teaching Materials Set 1 was created for EFL high school students in Vietnam, focusing on language features of cover letter writing; Teaching Materials Set 2 was created for ESL adult students in the USA, focusing on the structure of cover letters. Both materials are presented below.

#### **Teaching Materials Set 1**

##### ***Description***

Goals: The English program at FLSS is designed to develop students' integrated skills of the English language, including listening, speaking, writing, reading, and other linguistic aspects. The set of teaching materials in the following part of this paper aims to improve students' skills in writing cover letters.

Target students: higher-intermediate/early-advanced level; high school students; EFL context.

Target skills: Vocabulary: focusing on the use of the most frequent content word of the mini corpus "experience" in grammatical patterns.

#### **Activity 1: Find the most frequent content word in the corpus.**

1. Form groups of three.
2. Study the following steps to search with AntConc.
  - 1 Open AntConc program
  - 2 Upload data into AntConc. (Mini-corpora will be provided)  
File/ Open File(s)/ Users/ folder contained files/ command (or control) + shift to choose files. Files will be seen on "Corpus Files" column on the left.
  - 3 When the files are already uploaded, click "Word List" on the menu bar.
  - 4 Go to "Sort by" on the bottom left and select "Sort by Freq"
  - 5 Hit to see the most frequent word list of the corpus.
  - 6 Answer these questions:

- 6.a What is the most frequent content word of the minicorpus?
  - 6.b List the different possible meanings of the word you found.
  - 6.c Click on that word and examine the concordance lines. Circle the type of word it mostly appears in: Noun / Verb / Adjective / Adverb
  - 6.d Which meaning of the word is used in the context of cover letter writing?
  - 6.e Go to the Menu Bar, click on “Collocates”. Type in the word you found. Go to “Sort by” on the bottom left and select “Sort by Freq”. Under “Window Span” on the bottom right, set “From” to “1L”, and “To” to “0”. Click “Start”. What verbs do you see on this list of words that collocate with the word?
  - 6.f Go to the Menu Bar, click on “Concordance”. Type in the collocations you just found (Verb + experience), examine their use in context, and come up with your own example sentence for each.
  - 6.g What are your other findings from this investigation? Give examples if any.
- 7 Present the group’s results to the class.

**Activity 2: Discovering grammatical patterns with “experience”**

- 1 Study the following sentences in pairs or groups of 3.
- 2 Organize the sentences into 4 grammatical patterns with the word “*experience*”. The first one has been done for you (shown in the example box).
- 3 Compare your results with the other groups.
- 4 Present your group’s results on the board.

**Example:**

<b>Pattern: “Noun + experience”</b>
<p>Sentences: 5, 6, 9, 12, 20</p> <p>5. I strive to make the entire client <i>experience</i> extraordinary in every way, but nothing beats the mood-boosting confidence that clients display as they walk out of the salon.</p> <p>6. I bring to the table substantive intellectual property <i>experience</i> and expertise that would benefit your firm.</p> <p>9. I offer seven years of salon makeup <i>experience</i> and proven success generating revenue growth for makeup and other salon services.</p> <p>12. My 15 years of event management <i>experience</i> are well matched to the qualifications outlined in your event coordinator job announcement.</p> <p>20. My background includes three years of professional research <i>experience</i>, ....</p>

- 1 I offer *experience* as a special events manager, social media influencer and coordinator of branded promotions through leadership roles at XYZ University.

- 2 I have **experience** in all areas covered in your job ad.
- 3 Highlights of my credentials include **experiences** in both retail and hospital pharmacy operations.
- 4 Data-driven and highly analytical, I bring to the table 15 years of **experience** as a business analyst able to influence corporate growth strategies through fact-based, data-driven insights and analysis.
- 5 I strive to make the entire client **experience** extraordinary in every way, but nothing beats the mood-boosting confidence that clients display as they walk out of the salon.
- 6 I bring to the table substantive intellectual property **experience** and expertise that would benefit your firm.
- 7 Two years of **experience** as a civil engineer trainee and intern for premier design firms.
- 8 I am confident that my **experience** publishing and promoting content on social media and delivering on multiple platforms would benefit your newspaper as you move to digital delivery.
- 9 I offer seven years of salon makeup **experience** and proven success generating revenue growth for makeup and other salon services.
- 10 With nearly 10 years of **experience** as a pediatric nurse at ABC Children's Hospital, I offer the proven clinical skills, healthcare knowledge and record of patient-care excellence that you are seeking for your pediatric nurse opening.
- 11 My **experience** providing guidance, assessment and treatment for diverse patient populations combined with an ability to manage programs and build alliances would be valuable to your social work program.
- 12 My 15 years of event management **experience** are well matched to the qualifications outlined in your event coordinator job announcement.
- 13 In addition to my academic credentials, I offer hands-on **experience** in finance gained through a six-month internship with DEF Co, one of the largest full-service investment banks in the U.S.
- 14 As a pilot with **experience** in military, charter, and company settings, I offer 5,500 hours of flight time and credentials.
- 15 My **experience** developing user-friendly solutions on time and on budget would enable me to step into a software engineering role at XYZ Company and hit the ground running.
- 16 I gained **experience** working with students with a range of disabilities and learning differences within an inclusive classroom setting, and engaged young learners in activities to optimize their understanding of lessons presented.
- 17 I am a dedicated sales professional with **experience** propelling my assigned regions to record-setting revenue results.
- 18 I offer hands-on **experience** performing high-level administration of network environments.
- 19 My background includes three years of professional research **experience**, including my current role as a graduate research assistant at DEF University's Cancer Research Center and prior **experience** as a cellular biology research intern for XYZ Corp<sup>3/4a</sup> a world leader in cancer research and treatment.

<b>Pattern:</b>
Sentences:

<b>Pattern:</b>
Sentences:

<b>Pattern:</b>
Sentences:

**Activity 3: Practice**

Rewrite the following sentences with a different grammatical pattern with “experience” found above. Underline the grammatical pattern used. (The first one has been done for you.)

- 1 I offer seven years of salon **makeup experience** and proven success generating revenue growth for makeup and other salon services.

Your sentence: *I have seven years of experience in makeup and have proven success generating revenue growth for makeup and other salon services.*

- 2 I offer **experience as** a special events manager.

Your sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

- 3 I am confident that my **experience publishing and promoting** content on social media and delivering on multiple platforms would benefit your newspaper as you move to digital delivery.

Your sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

- 4 In addition to my academic credentials, I offer hands-on **experience in** finance gained through a six-month internship with DEF Co, one of the largest full-service investment banks in the U.S.

Your sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

- 5 My 15 years of **event management experience** are well matched to the qualifications outlined in your event coordinator job announcement.

Your sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

- 6 With nearly 10 years of **experience as** a pediatric nurse at ABC Children’s Hospital, I offer the proven clinical skills, healthcare knowledge and record of patient-care excellence that you are seeking for your pediatric nurse opening.

Your sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

- 7 Highlights of my credentials include **experiences in** both retail and hospital pharmacy operations.

Your sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 I am a dedicated sales professional with **experience propelling** my assigned regions to record-setting revenue results.

Your sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Teaching Materials Set 2**

**Description**

Goals: reflect on the general structure of cover letters; identify participants and their role; explore self-promoting language; locate and use formal language and formulaic expressions; practice writing a real cover letter.

Target students: higher-intermediate/early-advanced level; adults (immigrants); ESL context.

Target skills: reading (skimming); writing (short answers/chart filling & letter writing); speaking (discussion).

**Activity 1: What is the structure of a cover letter? [20 minutes]**

- 1 Have a look at the following three letters from [monster.com](http://www.monster.com). You don't have to read them carefully.

Letter A: <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/business-analyst-cover-letter>

Letter B: <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/journalism-cover-letter>

Letter C: <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/event-coordinator-cover-letter>

Can you see common parts in their structure?

- 2 Complete the chart

Section	What is being talked about?
Beginning	
Body (you can divide it into smaller parts)	
End	

- 3 Compare your chart in groups of three and discuss. What topics did you find in each part?
- 4 In groups, discuss where you would mention these points in a cover letter
  - a. Reason for writing
  - b. Past experience
  - c. Greetings
  - d. Request for further contact
  - e. Skills
  - f. Personal info
  - g. Mention of CV

**Activity 2: Who is involved in a cover letter? (I vs. you) [20 minutes]**

- 1 In the cover letters you checked earlier, who is the 'I' that writes? And who is the 'you'? Can you think of what type of characteristics they should have?

- 2 This is a list of the words that usually go together with ‘I’, ‘my’, ‘you’, and ‘your’.

I	My	You	Your
confident	qualifications	time	team
interested	skills	sincerely	time
experience	career	please	sincerely
reputation	credentials	soon	please
pride	ability	review	review
hope	years	delivery	advertisement
excited	experience	contact	job
strong	background		
eager	resume		
dedicated	commitment		
committed	goal		
commendation	strengths		

Based on the words, can you identify the features that a good candidate (the writer) should have? What are they about? And what about the job offerer (the reader and letter addressee)?

Writer: \_\_\_\_\_

Reader: \_\_\_\_\_

- 3 Compare your answer in groups. Decide on 2-3 characteristics that the writer and the reader should have in the cover letter, and report to the class

**Activity 3: Who is involved in a cover letter? (talk positively about myself) [20 minutes]**

- 1 Do you think it is important to self-promote yourself in a cover letter? How important is it from 1 to 5? Discuss in groups.
- 2 Look again at the list of words that usually go with ‘I’ (from activity 2). Underline all the adjectives.
- 3 What types of adjectives are there? Decide if they are positive (+) or negative (-)
- 4 Now, look at these clusters (groups) of words that go together with ‘I’. Can you put them in the right categories? Write I., II., or III. next to the phrase

I gained experience as a I have served as a I hope to hear from I offer hands-on experience I produced short-form videos I supervise a team of I take pride in delighting I take pride in providing I was commended for my I was intrigued when i I would be a valuable I would be able to I would like to discuss I would very much like I wrote news and feature	I am very interested in I have worked as a I look forward to speaking I look forward to hearing I am writing to apply I am confident in my I am confident that i I bring to the table I have earned a reputation I am confident i can I am confident that my I am eager to launch I look forward to learning I look forward to your I was very interested to	I will follow up with I would like to be I would quickly become a I would welcome the chance I am confident i would I am intimately familiar with I am seeking to transition I am writing to express I can be reached at I can contribute to the I co-launched and grew I currently serve as an I earned a reputation as I earned commendations for my I offer strong qualifications that
Past experience (I.)	Personal skills/qualities (II.)	Professionally address the addressee (III.)

- 5 Think about yourself and what type of job you would like to apply for. Which adjectives and useful expressions do you think are best to use in your case? You can add more.
- 6 Discuss in groups about everyone’s choices for doing some self-promotion.

**Activity 4: Be polite! [20 minutes]**

- 1 What ways do you know to say the following things in a conversation?  
 A) Scheduling to hang out again or see each other in the future: (ex. *Let’s talk soon!*)

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- B) Breaking the ice:

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- C) Exchanging contact information:

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- D) Addressing someone; saying hello/goodbye:

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- 2 When would you do these in conversation? At the beginning? At the end? Discuss in groups.

- 3 Have a look at the three cover letters from activity 1 (Appendix A). Can you find examples of how the writer expresses the four functions from before—A, B, C, and D? Write them down here:

A.	B.	C.	D.

- 4 Do you notice differences between the spoken conversation and the cover letters? Which ones are more formal?

**Activity 5: Time to write [10 minutes + homework]**

- 1 Do a quick search for a job opening you might be interested in. You can use a local newspaper and websites (monster.com, linkedin, craigslist or facebook insertions etc.).
- 2 Make a list of the skills you have that can be helpful in getting you the job. Think of all the past experiences you have had that can make you a good candidate (hint: What verb do we use to talk about experiences in the past, in general?)
- 3 Think about the reader of the letter. Who is the audience? Do some research about the company/business.
- 4 Using everything we have learned about cover letters, write the points you want your letter to cover.
- 5 (Homework) Write the first draft at home.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In conclusion, the corpus analysis above demonstrates many benefits of but also some challenges to the teaching of cover letter writing for second language learners. In terms of benefits, the analysis from the mini corpus above provides teachers with a variety of language points and patterns of cover letter writing that can be introduced to students. It also points out the level of importance of each language point by providing data of frequency numbers. This helps teachers navigate which linguistic features they should focus on more intensively, and which ones they should give less attention to. Regarding challenges, the above analysis only shows a general look at the language features provided in the mini corpus, and does not provide a step-by-step framework on how to write a cover letter.

In combating these challenges, when teaching cover letter writing, teachers should develop their syllabi using Henry and Roseberry’s Cover Letter Model (2001) (see Table 1 and 2) as guidelines and the above corpus analysis for specific language feature lessons. A combination of having a structural framework and specific language points and samples will help teachers create a thorough and well-rounded curriculum.

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## Appendix A

### Answer Keys for Teaching Materials Set 1

#### Activity 1

#### Investigate your Mini Corpus.

- 1 Answer these questions:
  - 1.a What is the most frequent content word of the minicorpus?  
*Experience*
  - 1.b List the different possible meanings of the word you found.  
*Experience* is used to refer to the past events, knowledge, and feelings that make up someone's life or character.  
An *experience* is something that you do or that happens to you, especially something important that affects you.  
*Experience* is knowledge or skill in a particular job or activity that you have gained because you have done that job or activity for a long time.  
If you *experience* a particular situation, you are in that situation or it happens to you.  
If you *experience* a feeling, you feel it or are affected by it.
  - 1.c Click on that word and examine the concordance lines. Circle the type of word it mostly appears in: Noun / Verb / Adjective / Adverb
  - 1.d Which meaning of the word is used in the context of cover letter writing?  
*Experience* is knowledge or skill in a particular job or activity that you have gained because you have done that job or activity for a long time.
  - 1.e Go to the Menu Bar, click on “Collocates”. Type in the word you found. Go to “Sort by” on the bottom left and select “Sort by Freq”. Under “Window Span” on the bottom right, set “From” to “1L”, and “To” to “0”. Click “Start”. What verbs do you see on this list of words that collocate with the word?  
*Gain, offer*
  - 1.f Go to the Menu Bar, click on “Concordance”. Type in the collocations you just found (Verb + experience), examine their use in context, and come up with your own example sentence for each.  
*Answers vary*
  - 1.g What are your other findings from this investigation? Give examples if any.  
*Answers vary*
- 2 Present the group’s results to the class.

## Activity 2

### Pattern 1: “Noun + experience”

Sentences: 5, 6, 9, 12, 20

5. I strive to make the entire client *experience* extraordinary in every way, but nothing beats the mood-boosting confidence that clients display as they walk out of the salon.
6. I bring to the table substantive intellectual property *experience* and expertise that would benefit your firm.
9. I offer seven years of salon makeup *experience* and proven success generating revenue growth for makeup and other salon services.
12. My 15 years of event management *experience* are well matched to the qualifications outlined in your event coordinator job announcement.
20. My background includes three years of professional research *experience*, ....

### Pattern 2: “experience + as + noun (person)”

Sentences: 1, 4, 7, 10, 20

1. I offer *experience* as a special events manager, social media influencer and coordinator of branded promotions through leadership roles at XYZ University.
4. Data-driven and highly analytical, I bring to the table 15 years of *experience* as a business analyst able to influence corporate growth strategies through fact-based, data-driven insights and analysis.
7. Two years of *experience* as a civil engineer trainee and intern for premier design firms.
10. With nearly 10 years of *experience* as a pediatric nurse at ABC Children’s Hospital, I offer the proven clinical skills, healthcare knowledge and record of patient-care excellence that you are seeking for your pediatric nurse opening.
20. ..., including my current role as a graduate research assistant at DEF University’s Cancer Research Center and prior *experience* as a cellular biology research intern for XYZ Corp<sup>3/4</sup>a world leader in cancer research and treatment.

### Pattern 3: “experience + in + noun (line of work)”

Sentences: 2, 3, 13, 14

2. I have *experience* in all areas covered in your job ad.
3. Highlights of my credentials include *experiences* in both retail and hospital pharmacy operations.
13. In addition to my academic credentials, I offer hands-on *experience* in finance gained through a six-month internship with DEF Co, one of the largest full-service investment banks in the U.S.
14. As a pilot with *experience* in military, charter and company settings, I offer 5,500 hours of flight time and credentials.

**Pattern 4: “experience + gerunds”**

Sentences: 8, 11, 15, 16, 17, 19

8. I am confident that my **experience** publishing and promoting content on social media and delivering on multiple platforms would benefit your newspaper as you move to digital delivery.

11. My **experience** providing guidance, assessment and treatment for diverse patient populations combined with an ability to manage programs and build alliances would be valuable to your social work program.

15. My **experience** developing user-friendly solutions on time and on budget would enable me to step into a software engineering role at XYZ Company and hit the ground running.

16. I gained **experience** working with students with a range of disabilities and learning differences within an inclusive classroom setting, and engaged young learners in activities to optimize their understanding of lessons presented.

17. I am a dedicated sales professional with **experience** propelling my assigned regions to record-setting revenue results.

19. I offer hands-on **experience** performing high-level administration of network environments.

**Activity 3**

- 1 I offer **experience as** a special events manager.

Your sentence: I offer **experience in** managing special events (Answers may vary)

- 2 I am confident that my **experience publishing and promoting** content on social media and delivering on multiple platforms would benefit your newspaper as you move to digital delivery.

Your sentence: I am confident that my **experience in publishing and promoting** content on social media and delivering on multiple platforms would benefit your newspaper as you move to digital delivery. (Answers may vary)

- 3 In addition to my academic credentials, I offer hands-on **experience in** finance gained through a six-month internship with DEF Co, one of the largest full-service investment banks in the U.S.

Your sentence: In addition to my academic credentials, I offer hands-on **finance experience** gained through a six-month internship with DEF Co, one of the largest full-service investment banks in the U.S. (Answers may vary)

- 4 My 15 years of **event management experience** are well matched to the qualifications outlined in your event coordinator job announcement.

Your sentence: My 15 years of **experience managing events** is well matched to the qualifications outlined in your event coordinator job announcement. (Answers may vary)

- 5 With nearly 10 years of **experience as** a pediatric nurse at ABC Children’s Hospital, I offer the proven clinical skills, healthcare knowledge and record of patient-care excellence that you are seeking for your pediatric nurse opening.

Your sentence: With nearly 10 years of **experience being a pediatric nurse** at ABC Children’s Hospital, I offer the proven clinical skills, healthcare knowledge and

- record of patient-care excellence that you are seeking for your pediatric nurse opening. (Answers may vary)
- 6 Highlights of my credentials include **experiences in** both retail and hospital pharmacy operations.  
Your sentence: Highlights of my credentials include **both retail and hospital pharmacy experiences.** (Answers may vary)
- 7 I am a dedicated sales professional with **experience propelling** my assigned regions to record-setting revenue results.  
Your sentence: I am a dedicated sales professional with **experience in propelling** my assigned regions to record-setting revenue results. (Answers may vary)

**Appendix B**

**Answer Keys for Teaching Materials Set 2**

**Activity 1: What is the structure of a cover letter? [20 minutes]**

- 1 Have a look at the following three letters (Appendix B). You don't have to read them carefully. Can you see common parts in their structure? *Answers may vary, such as: beginning and endings are similar; sharing of address, phone number, etc.; listing applicant's skills; listing past experiences...*
- 2 Complete the chart

Section	What is going on? What is being talked about?
Beginning	Greetings; mentioning job offer
Body (you can divide it into smaller parts)	Expressing interest in the job Listing past work experiences Listing qualifications
End	Providing means for contact; greetings and thanking

- 3 Compare your chart in groups of three and discuss. What topics did you find in each part? *Answers depend on previous exercise.*
- 4 In groups, discuss where you would mention these points in a cover letter:
  - a. Reason for writing
  - b. Past experience
  - c. Greetings
  - d. Request for further contact
  - e. Skills
  - f. Personal info
  - g. Mention of CV*Answers vary.*

**Activity 2: Who is involved in a cover letter? (I vs. you) [20 minutes]**

- 1 In the cover letters you checked earlier, who is the 'I' that writes? And who is the 'you'? Can you think of what type of characteristics they should have? *Possible answers: 'I' is the person writing the letter; 'you' is the receiver, likely the job offerer. The writer should be confident, show knowledge, be polite, express interest, make an impact. 'You' should be respected and talked to in a proper register.*
- 2 This is a list of the words that usually go together with 'I', 'my', 'you', and 'your'.

I	My	You	Your
confident	qualifications	time	team
interested	skills	sincerely	time
experience	career	please	sincerely
reputation	credentials	soon	please

pride	ability	review	review
hope	years	delivery	advertisement
excited	experience	contact	job
strong	background		
eager	resume		
dedicated	commitment		
committed	goal		
commendation	strengths		

Based on the words, can you identify the features that a good candidate (the writer) should have? What are they about? And what about the job offerer (the reader and letter addressee)?

Writer: positive attitude, self confidence, initiative

Reader: respectable, worthy of respect, professionalism

- 3 Compare your answer in groups. Decide on 2-3 characteristics that the writer and the reader should have in the cover letter, and report to the class. *Answers vary*

**Activity 3: Who is involved in a cover letter? (talk positively about myself) [20 minutes]**

- 1 Do you think it is important to self-promote yourself in a cover letter? How important is it from 1 to 5? Discuss in groups. *Answers vary*
- 2 Look again at the list of words that usually go with ‘I’ (from activity 2). Underline all the adjectives. *Confident, interested, excited, strong, eager, dedicated, committed.*
- 3 What type of adjectives are? Decide if they are positive (+) or negative (-) *Positive*
- 4 Now, look at these clusters (groups) of words that go together with ‘I’. Can you put them in the right categories? Write I., II., or III. next to the phrase

I gained experience as a <b>I.</b> I have served as a <b>I.</b> I hope to hear from <b>III.</b> I offer hands-on experience <b>II.</b> I produced short-form videos <b>I.</b> I supervise a team of <b>II.</b> I take pride in delighting <b>II.</b> I take pride in providing <b>II.</b> I was commended for my <b>II.</b> I was intrigued when i <b>III.</b> I would be a valuable <b>II.</b>	I am very interested in <b>III.</b> I have worked as a <b>I.</b> I look forward to speaking <b>III.</b> I look forward to hearing <b>III.</b> I am writing to apply <b>III.</b> I am confident in my <b>II.</b> I am confident that i <b>II.</b> I bring to the table <b>II.</b> I have earned a reputation <b>II.</b> I am confident I can <b>II.</b> I am confident that my <b>II.</b>	I will follow up with <b>III.</b> I would like to be <b>III.</b> I would quickly become a <b>III.</b> I would welcome the chance <b>III.</b> I am confident I would <b>III.</b> I am intimately familiar with <b>II.</b> I am seeking to transition <b>III.</b> I am writing to express <b>III.</b> I can be reached at <b>III.</b> I can contribute to the <b>III.</b> I co-launched and grew <b>I.</b>
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<p>I would be able to <b>II</b>.          I would like to discuss <b>III</b>.          I would very much like <b>III</b>.          I wrote news and feature <b>I</b>.</p>	<p>I am eager to launch <b>II</b>.          I look forward to learning <b>III</b>.          I look forward to your <b>III</b>.          I was very interested to <b>III</b>.</p>	<p>I currently serve as an <b>II</b>.          I earned a reputation as <b>II</b>.          I earned commendations for my <b>II</b>.          I offer strong qualifications that <b>II</b>.</p>
Past experience (I.)	Personal skills/qualities (II.)	Professionally address the addressee (III.)

- 5 Think about yourself and what type of job you would like to apply for. Which adjectives and useful expressions do you think are best to use in your case? You can add more. *Answers vary*
- 6 Discuss in groups about everyone’s choices for doing some self-promotion. *Answers vary*

**Activity 4: Be polite! [20 minutes]**

- 1 What ways do you know to say the following things in a conversation? *Possible answers:*
  - A) Scheduling to hang out again or see each other in the future: (ex. *Let’s talk soon!*)  
*Let’s talk soon; talk soon; can we talk about this another time?  
 See you soon!; I’ll see you next week then; let’s meet again  
 Are you free to hang out this \_\_\_?; we should hang out soon; let’s plan a date!*
  - B) Breaking the ice:  
*Hey there, you don’t know me, but...; Hi, can I talk to you for a second?  
 Hey I was texting to...; Hi, did you get my message?  
 I wanted to ask you something...*
  - C) Exchanging contact information:  
*This is my number; Add me on insta!; What’s your email address?  
 Do you have Line?; You can call me at this number...*
  - D) Addressing someone; saying hello/goodbye:  
*Nice to meet you! I am...; How’s it going?  
 Excuse me.  
 Bye!; Take care!; Don’t be a stranger.*
- 2 When would you do these in conversation? At the beginning? At the end? Discuss in group. *Answers vary*
- 3 Have a look at the three cover letters from activity 1 (Appendix A). Can you find examples of how the writer expresses the four functions from before–A, B, C, and D? Write them down here: *Answers vary*
- 4 Do you notice differences between the spoken conversation and the cover letters? Which ones are more formal? *Cover letters are more formal*

**Activity 5: Time to write [10 minutes + homework]**

- 1 Do a quick search for a job opening you might be interested in. You can use a local newspaper and websites (monster.com, linkedin, craigslist or facebook insertions etc.).  
*Answers vary*
- 2 Make a list of the skills you have that can be helpful in getting you the job. Think of all the past experiences you have had that can make you a good candidate (hint: what verb do we use to talk about experiences in the past, in general?). *Answers vary*
- 3 Think about the reader of the letter. Who is the audience? Do some research about the company/business. *Answers vary*
- 4 Using everything we have learned about cover letters, write the points you want your letter to cover. *Answers vary*
- 5 (Homework) Write the first draft at home. *Answers vary*

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**About the Authors:**

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